

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter addresses the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on elements of the human environment from actions proposed in the CDCA Plan Amendment. This chapter is organized by environmental element, followed by a description and comparison of impacts from the relevant plan element alternatives.

Land use plans, such as the CDCA Plan Amendment, developed in accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, provide landscape level decisions for managing the BLM-administered public lands. As a result, the impact analysis for land use plans level actions tends to be cumulative by nature.

4.1 Land Use Designations

This section describes impacts to the following special area designations: areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), Wild and Scenic Rivers, wilderness areas, farmlands, livestock grazing, and wild horse and burro management areas.

4.1.1 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Proposed Plan (Alternative A). No new ACECs would be designated under the Proposed Plan; the existing 61,419 acres of ACECs would continue to be managed accordingly. BLM-managed lands within the CVMSHCP conservation area would be designated as a Wildlife Habitat Management Area (40,541 acres). The Wildlife Habitat Management Area designation itself would have no direct impact on the resources or allowable uses within that area. The allowable uses within the Wildlife Habitat Management Area and resultant impact on resources contained therein, will depend on the management guidance established for the Wildlife Habitat Management Area.

This CDCA Plan Amendment presents alternative strategies which would guide management of the Wildlife Habitat Management Area and may result in changes in land use, such as motorized vehicle access, utilities, sand and gravel mining, etc. The remainder of this chapter analyzes how the various alternative strategies impact use of the public lands and the resources contained therein.

Additional management prescriptions may be adopted through the final CVMSHCP planning effort. Cumulatively, implementation of the management prescriptions within CVMSHCP conservation areas would result in less intensive use of the public lands in order to facilitate multi-species habitat conservation and management.

Alternative B. Within the CVMSHCP conservation area, 21,393 acres would be designated as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in addition to the existing 61,419 acres of ACECs, and the remaining 33,691 acres would be designated as WHMA. Similar to Alternative A, the ACEC and WHMA designations themselves would have no direct impact on the resources or allowable uses within that area. The allowable uses

within the ACECs and WHMAs and resultant impact on resources contained therein, will depend on the management guidance established for the Wildlife Habitat Management Area.

ACECs can only be designated if there are relevant and important resources in need of special management protection in accordance with law, regulation and policy. While the importance of the potential ACECs could be demonstrated (see Chapter 3 of this document), the relevance of these potential ACECs could not be established at this time because several of the threatened and endangered species distribution maps were based on modeling and were not verified through field surveys.

Alternative C. Under this alternative, 40,541 acres of BLM land would be designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, added to the existing ACEC acreage of 61,419. While the importance of this potential ACEC could be demonstrated, the relevance could not be established at this time because several of the threatened and endangered species distribution maps were based on modeling and were not verified through field surveys.

No Action Alternative (D). No new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Wildlife Habitat Management Areas would be designated at this time; the existing 61,419 acres of ACECs would continue to be managed accordingly. Existing area designations would remain unchanged. Sensitive resources would still be taken into consideration in accordance with law, regulation and policy, when evaluating the compatibility of land use proposals on the BLM-managed lands. However, this evaluation would occur on a project-by-project basis without benefit of a landscape perspective for multi-species management.

4.1.2 Wild and Scenic Rivers

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Determinations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Wild and Scenic River eligibility determinations made through this Plan Amendment apply only to river segments on BLM-managed public lands. River segments determined eligible are located in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel, North Fork, South Fork, and West Fork), and Palm Canyon. Of these segments, 6.5 miles of Whitewater Canyon, 5.2 miles of the Mission Creek main channel, 0.4 miles of Mission Creek North Fork, 1.1 miles of Mission Creek South Fork, and 2.9 miles of Mission Creek West Fork, totaling 16.1 miles in length, occur within the San Geronio Wilderness Additions; outside this wilderness area, 1.6 miles of Whitewater Canyon and 1.4 miles of the Mission Creek main channel occur within a CVMSHCP conservation area. The 1.2-mile eligible river segment in Palm Canyon is located within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.

Once a river segment has been determined eligible and given a tentative classification as “wild,” “scenic,” and/or “recreational,” BLM is required to protect its free-flowing characteristics; protect, and to the degree practicable, enhance the Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORVs) which contribute to the river segment’s eligibility; and

ensure that its eligibility or tentative classification will not be affected before a determination of its suitability or non-suitability as a Wild and Scenic River can be made. Protective management measures described in Appendix B meet these requirements. Hence, eligibility of the identified BLM-managed river segments under the Proposed Plan would not be compromised prior to determinations of suitability or non-suitability as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

No Action Alternative (D). As determinations regarding eligibility of BLM-managed river segments for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers would not be made at this time under this alternative, impacts to possible eligible segments consequent to existing management are unknown; protective management measures pending determinations of suitability or non-suitability would not be identified. However, it is anticipated that existing management of designated wilderness would not compromise future determinations of eligibility for river segments therein. The free-flowing character and resource values of river segments in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument would likely be adequately protected under provisions of the establishing legislation.

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Managing BLM lands along 16.1 miles of eligible river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks) within the San Geronio Wilderness Additions in accordance with Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 1 objectives would maintain scenic values and is consistent with BLM policy that such management of visual resources be applied to Wild and Scenic Rivers upon designation. Outside the San Geronio Wilderness Additions, 1.6 miles of Whitewater Canyon and 1.4 miles of Mission Creek (main channel) would be managed in accordance with VRM Class 2 objectives. Such management would be inconsistent with BLM policy should these segments of Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek be designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. In the meantime, however, protective management measures identified in Appendix B would maintain scenic values in these river corridors during preparation of a suitability study.

The Proposed Plan would designate the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument as VRM Class 2 which would be inconsistent with BLM policy should the BLM-managed segment of Palm Canyon (1.2 miles in length) be designated as a Wild and Scenic River. However, existing protective management measures identified in Appendix B would maintain scenic values within Palm Canyon during the suitability study phase.

No Action Alternative (D). The effects of managing BLM lands consistent with interim VRM objectives established on a case-by-case basis when project proposals are submitted, except for lands within the Santa Rosa and San Geronio Wilderness Additions which are managed in accordance with VRM Class 1 objectives by policy, would be the same as for the Proposed Plan; protective management measures must be undertaken for all river segments determined eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Scenic values of eligible river segments would not likely be adversely affected under this alternative.

Land Health Standards and Air Quality. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C).

The Proposed Plan would ensure that management of all activities in accordance with regional land health standards and the air quality management strategy would help maintain and could enhance the outstandingly remarkable wildlife values of BLM-managed river segments located in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon (totaling 20.3 miles in length) where appropriate levels of soil infiltration and permeability are retained, habitats for native species are protected, proper riparian/wetland and stream function is facilitated, and air water quality is maintained. Where conditions of these resources are improved, Outstandingly Remarkable Values could be enhanced.

No Action Alternative (D). Relative to the river segments identified under the Proposed Plan as eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation, management of all activities in accordance with National Fallback Standards adopted as regional land health standards would help maintain outstandingly remarkable wildlife values of BLM-managed river segments located in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon where appropriate soil infiltration and permeability rates are retained, habitats for native species are protected, and riparian/wetland and stream function in facilitated. Where conditions of these resources are improved, Outstandingly Remarkable Values could be enhanced.

Multiple-Use Classification. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The Santa Rosa and San Geronio Wilderness Additions are designated as Multiple-Use Class “C” (Controlled Use) in accordance with the CDCA Plan (1980, as amended). Under the Proposed Plan, non-wilderness lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and within CVMSHCP conservation areas would be classified as Multiple-Use Class “L” (Limited Use). Management of river segments on BLM lands in Whitewater Canyon, along Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and in Palm Canyon (totaling 20.3 miles in length) according to Multiple-Use Class “C” and “L” guidelines and in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000, where applicable, would not adversely affect the eligibility of these segments as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C).

Management of all activities consistent with habitat conservation objectives identified in Table 2-4 would help maintain the outstandingly remarkable wildlife values of BLM-managed river segments in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon (totaling 20.3 miles in length) where habitat conditions for sensitive species are minimally disturbed. Where habitat conditions for sensitive species are improved, Outstandingly Remarkable Values could be enhanced.

All Alternatives (A, B, C and D). Management direction provided by the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 regarding allowable uses within the Santa Rosa and San Geronio Wilderness Additions, and guidance provided by the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto National Monument Act of 2000 regarding allowable uses

in Palm Canyon afford protection for existing habitats of sensitive species therein; outstandingly remarkable wildlife values of BLM-managed river segments within these areas would not be compromised. Further, protective management measures undertaken for all river segments determined eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would protect existing habitats for species that constitute Outstandingly Remarkable Values (Appendix B).

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Fire suppression in habitat types where fire has not historically played a large role in the development and maintenance of these communities would help sustain the natural wilderness character of Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks) within the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, thereby protecting the outstandingly remarkable wildlife values that establish, in part, the eligibility of 16.1 miles of river segments at these locations as Wild and Scenic Rivers (Proposed Plan). Prescribed fires in wilderness are consistent with BLM policy where the natural condition of a fire-dependent ecosystem would be reintroduced or maintained; where past strict fire control measures have interfered with natural, ecological processes; where a primary value of a given wilderness would be perpetuated; or where a threatened or endangered species would be perpetuated. The fire management categories established under these alternatives would be consistent with BLM policy.

Fire suppression and/or prescribed fires on BLM-managed lands outside designated wilderness in Whitewater Canyon, along Mission Creek, and in Palm Canyon would likewise protect the outstandingly remarkable wildlife values of river segments at these locations (totaling 4.2 miles in length), though the extent to which these values would benefit from fire management actions undertaken in accordance with the fire management categories is unknown.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Managing fires in accordance with the CDCA Plan and the District-wide Fire Management Plan would help sustain the outstandingly remarkable wildlife values for BLM-managed river segments in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon by maintaining natural conditions. In accordance with BLM policy relative to river segments in the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, all fire management plans must consider wilderness management objectives, historic fire occurrence, natural role of fire, proposed degree of suppression, and acceptable suppression techniques. These considerations lend themselves to protection of ORVs.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C, and No Action (D). No impacts to eligible Wild and Scenic River segments within the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions and Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument would occur as no new special area designations (ACECs or WHMAs) are proposed for these areas. The eligible segment of Whitewater Canyon outside wilderness occurs within the existing Whitewater Canyon ACEC; no changes in special area designation would occur under any Alternative. Under Alternative A, the eligible segment of Mission Creek outside wilderness would be designated as a WHMA; under Alternatives B and C, it would be designated as an ACEC. As a WHMA or ACEC, this

segment of Mission Creek may receive special management attention for the protection of important wildlife resources, thereby protecting its outstandingly remarkable wildlife values.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C).

The exchange and sale criteria under the Proposed Plan, prescribing that BLM lands would generally be retained in public ownership, supports continued protective management of eligible Wild and Scenic River segments totaling 20.3 miles in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon. However, stewardship transfer of lands in Palm Canyon with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians as supported by Alternatives B and C, and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 could result in the disposal of BLM-managed river segments in Palm Canyon (see “Wild Horse and Burro Program” below under this section addressing Wild and Scenic Rivers). If this occurs, responsibility for coordinating a Wild and Scenic River suitability study of Palm Canyon would transfer to the U.S. Forest Service if, as determined through its land use planning process, segments of Palm Canyon on USFS lands are determined eligible.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Consideration of public land disposals on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the CDCA Plan would not affect eligible river segments as they must be protected pending determinations of suitability or non-suitability; disposal of these lands would not likely occur.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Acquisition criteria under the Proposed Plan—prescribing that lands to be acquired would augment public ownership in sensitive areas, or improve biotic or abiotic habitat components of lands under conservation management—could result in additional segments of Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon being considered for eligibility as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Consideration of public land acquisitions on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the CDCA Plan could similarly result in additional segments being considered for eligibility, though perhaps on a different schedule.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). Upon acquisition of lands in wilderness containing river segments that may be eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers, management of these lands in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 would provide sufficient protection of free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values until determinations of suitability or non-suitability are made. Regarding acquired lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, the values in Palm Canyon would be protected through management actions undertaken in accordance with the legislation establishing the National Monument. Lands acquired outside wilderness and the National Monument where eligible river segments occur must be managed to protect the values herein referenced until such time that suitability determinations can be made.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). No impacts to BLM-managed river segments eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers within wilderness (river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek totaling 16.1 miles in length) would occur as no specific action identified under any Alternative relative to communication sites and utilities conflicts with management of wilderness as set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. In accordance with statute and subject to private existing rights, any new communication facility or utility, or rights-of-way thereto attached, are prohibited in wilderness. Relative to the eligible BLM-managed river segment in Palm Canyon (1.2 miles in length), the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 requires that the National Monument management plan address the need for and, as necessary, establish plans for the installation, construction, and maintenance of public utility rights-of-way outside designated wilderness. In any event, eligible river segments must be managed to protect their free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values until such time that suitability determinations can be made. Table B-3 of Appendix B describes these protective measures.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). No impacts to BLM-managed river segments eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers within wilderness (river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek totaling 16.1 miles in length) would occur as no action identified under any Alternative relative to sand and gravel mining conflicts with management of wilderness as set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. In accordance with statute and subject to valid existing rights, no person shall obtain any right or interest in or to any mineral deposits that may be discovered through prospecting or other information-gathering activity in designated wilderness. Relative to the eligible BLM-managed river segment in Palm Canyon (1.2 miles in length), the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 withdraws federal lands from operation of the mineral materials laws, subject to valid existing rights. Such withdrawal would help protect the free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of these river segments until such time suitability determinations can be made. In any event, eligible river segments must be managed to protect their free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values until such time that suitability determinations can be made. Table B-3 of Appendix B describes these protective measures.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, livestock grazing is provided for in wilderness where such use was established before wilderness designation. Grazing in the San Geronio Wilderness Additions (Whitewater Canyon Allotment) meets this provision. Whether grazing is continued or discontinued, impacts to BLM-managed river segments eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers within wilderness (river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek totaling 16.1 miles in length) would not be anticipated. Continuance of grazing activities must conform, at a minimum, to National Fallback Standards and Guidelines that would help maintain free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of these river segments until such time suitability

determinations can be made.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B). The Palm Canyon land exchange with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians as proposed under Alternative B and as provided for in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 would effectively transfer responsibility for coordinating a Wild and Scenic River suitability study of Palm Canyon to the U.S. Forest Service if, as determined through its land use planning process, segments of Palm Canyon on USFS lands are determined eligible.

All Alternatives (A, B, C and D). Until the exchange of lands occurs with the Agua Caliente Tribe, or if an exchange does not occur, management of wild horses on public lands in Palm Canyon must protect the free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the BLM-managed river segment (1.2 miles in length) until such time that suitability determinations can be made. Table B-3 of Appendix B describes these protective measures.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Where river segments occur in wilderness, motorized-vehicle access is controlled. In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, motorized vehicles are prohibited in designated wilderness except where access is required to enjoy private property, to facilitate activities associated with valid mining claims or other valid occupancies, to fulfill fish and wildlife management responsibilities under jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game, or to accomplish certain administrative and law enforcement operations, including fire suppression and search and rescue operations. Hence, wilderness areas are designated as “closed” to motorized-vehicle access, thereby protecting free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of eligible river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek (totaling 16.1 miles in length) from incursions by casual motorized-vehicle use. Authorized motorized-vehicle access within wilderness along a portion of Mission Creek (main channel) and Mission Creek West Fork by a private landowner is not frequent and would not adversely affect outstandingly remarkable wildlife values.

Motorized-vehicle access along the eligible portions of Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek outside wilderness (totaling 3.0 miles) is restricted to routes designated “open” (Alternatives A, B [Proposed Plan] and C) or existing routes (Alternative D); river values would not likely be adversely affected by such restricted use. Relative to BLM-managed lands in Palm Canyon, closing the Dry Wash route to casual motorized-vehicle access (all Alternatives) would protect river values on 1.2 miles of the channel from potential incursions by motorized vehicles.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). Route designations under any alternative would result in the same impacts to eligible BLM-managed river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek as discussed above under “Motorized-Vehicle Area Designations.” Closing the Dry Wash route to casual motorized-vehicle use (all alternatives) would

protect river values on BLM-managed lands in Palm Canyon that could be threatened by uncontrolled motorized-vehicle intrusions.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). The proposed Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area, established under Alternatives A, B and C, is not located near any river segment on BLM-managed lands that has been determined as eligible for designation as a Wild and Scenic River.

Stopping, Parking and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B), Alternatives C and No Action (D). Given that motorized-vehicle access is prohibited in wilderness except under certain circumstances (i.e., where access is required to enjoy private property, to facilitate activities associated with valid mining claims or other valid occupancies, to fulfill fish and wildlife management responsibilities under jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game, or to accomplish certain administrative and law enforcement operations, including fire suppression and search and rescue operations), opportunities for the general public to stop, park, or camp with vehicles are not available. Hence, BLM-managed river segments eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers within wilderness (river segments in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek totaling 16.1 miles in length) would not be affected. Closing the Dry Wash route to casual motorized-vehicle use under all Alternatives also eliminates opportunities to stop, park, or vehicle camp near BLM-managed lands in Palm Canyon, thereby helping to protect river values along 1.2 miles of the Canyon.

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). All Alternatives are consistent with existing conservation measures provided by the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act and wilderness designation. Free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of eligible rivers segments in Palm Canyon would be protected.

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Limiting non-motorized uses of the public lands to protect sensitive resources could help maintain Outstandingly Remarkable Values of BLM-managed river segments determined eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers (river segments in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek, and Palm Canyon totaling 20.3 miles in length). The degree to which such values would be better protected cannot be ascertained until specific limitations on use are identified through an activity-level plan (e.g., Trails Management Plan element of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan).

All Alternatives (A, B, C and D). Under all Alternatives, eligible river segments must be managed to protect their free-flowing characteristics and Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) until such time that suitability determinations can be made. Use of trails on a year-round basis has not been determined as threatening ORVs; such determination is being considered relative to Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep (an ORV relative to the Palm Canyon) through the trails management plan element of the

Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.

4.1.3 Wilderness

Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Determinations. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Eligibility determinations for possible inclusion of certain river segments in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System apply only to segments on BLM-managed public lands in Whitewater Canyon, Mission Creek (main channel and its three forks), and Palm Canyon totaling 20.3 miles. Of these segments, portions in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek (totaling 16.1 miles) occur within the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions. Once a river segment has been determined eligible and given a tentative classification as “wild,” “scenic,” and/or “recreational,” BLM is required to protect its free-flowing characteristics; protect, and to the degree practicable, enhance the Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORVs) which contribute to the river segment’s eligibility; and ensure that its eligibility or tentative classification will not be affected before a determination of its suitability or non-suitability as a Wild and Scenic River can be made. Existing management of the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 affords sufficient protection to meet these requirements. As no specific management prescriptions are proposed to additionally protect the free-flowing characteristics and ORVs of the eligible river segments in wilderness, changes to the existing wilderness values are not anticipated.

No Action Alternative (D). Deferral of eligibility determinations for river segments on BLM-managed lands in Whitewater Canyon and Mission Creek would not affect wilderness values of the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions. Management of this area in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 affords adequate protection of wilderness values without implementing additional measures to ensure that the free-flowing characteristics and ORVs of these river segments are maintained pending a determination of suitability or non-suitability as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Visual Resource Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). In accordance with BLM policy, wilderness areas are managed consistent with Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 1 objectives. In VRM Class 1 areas, very limited management activities are allowed. Management of the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions in accordance with these VRM objectives, as well as the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, would retain the apparent naturalness of these areas, i.e., existing visual quality would be protected on 95,462 acres.

Land Health Standards and Air Quality. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action (D). Management of all activities in accordance with regional land health standards as specified under the Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) or National Fallback Standards adopted as regional land health standards (Alternative D) would help maintain wilderness character on 166,860 acres of public lands in the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia

Mountains Wilderness where appropriate levels of soil infiltration and permeability are retained, habitats for native species are protected, proper riparian/wetland and stream function is facilitated, and air and water quality are maintained. Where conditions of these resources are improved, wilderness character would be enhanced.

Multiple-Use Classification. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). The Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness are designated as Multiple-Use Class “C” (Controlled Use) in accordance with the CDCA Plan (1980, as amended). As no change in such designation is herein proposed, no impacts to wilderness values would occur under any Alternative relative to multiple-use classifications.

Habitat Conservation Objectives. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Management of all activities consistent with habitat conservation objectives identified in Table 2-4 of the Proposed Plan would help maintain wilderness character on 166,860 acres of public lands in the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness by ensuring sensitive species and their habitats are minimally disturbed. Where habitat conditions for sensitive species are improved, wilderness character would be enhanced.

All Alternatives (A, B, C and D). Management guidance provided by the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 regarding allowable uses within these wilderness areas protects habitats of sensitive species therein. Hence, wilderness values related to these species and their habitats would be maintained.

Fire Management. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C). Under the Proposed Plan, fire suppression in habitat types where fire has not historically played a large role in the development and maintenance of these communities would help sustain the natural wilderness character of the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness (166,860 acres of public lands in total). Prescribed fires in wilderness are consistent with BLM policy where the natural condition of a fire-dependent ecosystem would be reintroduced or maintained; where past strict fire control measures have interfered with natural, ecological processes; where a primary value of a given wilderness would be perpetuated; or where a threatened or endangered species would be perpetuated. The fire management categories established under these alternatives would be consistent with BLM policy. The extent to which wilderness values would benefit from fire management actions undertaken in accordance with the fire management categories is unknown.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Managing fires in accordance with the CDCA Plan and the District-wide Fire Management Plan would help sustain the natural wilderness character of the Santa Rosa and San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness by protecting natural conditions. In accordance with BLM policy, all fire management plans must consider wilderness management objectives, historic fire occurrence, natural role of fire, proposed degree of suppression, and acceptable suppression techniques.

Special Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). No impacts to wilderness values would occur as no new special area designations (ACECs and WHMAs) are proposed for wilderness.

Land Tenure: Exchange and Sale Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No impacts to resource values on 166,860 acres of public lands in wilderness would occur as the proposed exchange and sale criteria (Proposed Plan - Alternatives B and C) do not conflict with existing BLM strategies (Alternatives A and D) or the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 (the latter pertaining only to the Santa Rosa Wilderness Additions) regarding exchanges and sales of lands within designated wilderness.

Land Tenure: Acquisition Criteria. Proposed Plan (Alternatives B and C), Alternatives A and No Action (D). No impacts to resource values on 166,860 acres of public lands in wilderness would occur as the proposed acquisition criteria (Proposed Plan - Alternatives B and C) do not conflict with existing BLM strategies (Alternatives A and D) or the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 (the latter pertaining only to the Santa Rosa Wilderness Additions) regarding acquisition of non-federal lands within designated wilderness.

Management of Acquired Lands. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C) and No Action Alternative (D). No impacts to resource values on 166,860 acres of public lands in wilderness would occur as the management criteria under the Proposed Plan do not conflict with existing management of acquired lands in wilderness as set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, or the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000.

Communication Sites and Utilities. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). No impacts to resource values on 166,860 acres of public lands in wilderness would occur as no specific action identified under any Alternative relative to communication sites and utilities conflicts with management of wilderness as set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. In accordance with statute and subject to private existing rights, any new communication facility or utility, or rights-of-way thereto attached, are prohibited in wilderness.

Sand and Gravel Mining. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). No impacts to resource values on 166,860 acres of public lands in wilderness would occur as no specific action identified under any Alternative relative to sand and gravel mining conflicts with management of wilderness as set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. In accordance with statute and subject to valid existing rights, no person shall obtain any right or interest in or to any mineral deposits that may be discovered through prospecting or other information-gathering activity in designated wilderness.

Livestock Grazing. Proposed Plan (Alternative A), Alternatives B, C and No Action (D). In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, livestock grazing is provided for in wilderness where such use was

established before wilderness designation. Grazing in the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions (Whitewater Canyon Allotment) meets this provision. Whether grazing is continued or suspended, or the allotment is retired, impacts to wilderness resource values on 38,550 acres of public lands would not be anticipated. Continuance of grazing activities must conform, at a minimum, to National Fallback Standards and Guidelines that would help maintain wilderness values associated with soils, riparian and wetland areas, stream function, and native species.

Wild Horse and Burro Program. Proposed Plan (Alternative B) and Alternative C. Retirement of the Morongo Herd Management Area would reduce the potential for grazing pressures on native vegetation, soil trampling and erosion in the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions, thereby potentially enhancing wilderness values associated with soils, riparian and wetland areas, stream function, and native species. However, there are currently no burros within this HMA, and there are no known sources of new burro populations that may migrate into the area. Hence, retirement of the HMA would not change the current condition relative to wilderness values.

The Palm Canyon HMA is not located within designated wilderness. Its retirement, therefore, would not affect wilderness values.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Retention of the Morongo HMA could potentially affect wilderness values in the San Gorgonio Wilderness Additions if burros were to populate the area and exceed the limit of 16 animals. Grazing pressure on native vegetation, soil trampling and erosion could adversely affect wilderness values associated with soils, riparian and wetland areas, stream function, and native species.

Retention of the Palm Canyon HMA would not affect wilderness values as it is not located within designated wilderness.

Motorized Vehicle Area Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, motorized vehicles are prohibited in designated wilderness except where access is required to enjoy private property, to facilitate activities associated with valid mining claims or other valid occupancies, to fulfill fish and wildlife management responsibilities under jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game, or to accomplish certain administrative and law enforcement operations, including fire suppression and search and rescue operations. Hence, wilderness areas are designated as “closed” to motorized-vehicle access.

Motorized Vehicle Route Designations. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A, C and No Action (D). In accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, motorized vehicles are prohibited in designated wilderness except where access is required to enjoy private property, to facilitate activities associated with valid mining claims or other valid occupancies, to fulfill fish and wildlife management responsibilities under jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game, or to accomplish certain administrative and law enforcement operations, including fire suppression and search and rescue operations.

Hence, all routes within wilderness are designated as “closed” to casual motorized-vehicle access as a matter of course.

Special Recreation Management Area. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. Designation of the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) in and of itself would not affect resource values on 71,398 acres of public lands within the adjacent Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness Areas. Subsequent development of a Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) that addresses motorized and mechanized equipment intrusions into these wilderness areas, however, would benefit wilderness values to the degree that such intrusions are minimized upon its implementation. The degree to which vehicle intrusions would be minimized is unknown at this time.

Facets of wilderness management other than the control of motorized-vehicle access that affect wilderness values would also be addressed in the RAMP, e.g., opportunities for commercial recreation uses, opportunities for primitive types of recreation activities, and the future of existing structures. Where wilderness values can be better protected or enhanced, benefits to the wilderness resource would be accrued. However, the degree to which wilderness values would be better protected or enhanced consequent to implementation of the RAMP is unknown at this time.

No Action Alternative (D). No designation of a Special Recreation Management Area in the Mecca Hills/Orocopia Mountains region could result in adverse impacts to wilderness values in the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses to the degree that special or more intensive management of motorized-vehicles to minimize intrusions does not occur. With the installation of vehicle barriers and dissemination of educational materials, vehicle intrusions into these wilderness areas have been reduced since passage of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, though intrusions continue to occur. Future occurrences of such intrusions under existing management are unknown.

Stopping, Parking and Vehicle Camping. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A and B), Alternatives C and No Action (D). Given that motorized-vehicle access is prohibited in wilderness except under certain circumstances (i.e., where access is required to enjoy private property, to facilitate activities associated with valid mining claims or other valid occupancies, to fulfill fish and wildlife management responsibilities under jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game, or to accomplish certain administrative and law enforcement operations, including fire suppression and search and rescue operations), opportunities for the general public to stop, park, or camp with vehicles are not available. Hence, proposals under any Alternative are not pertinent to designated wilderness.

Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Strategy. Proposed Plan (Alternative B), Alternatives A and C. The Proposed Plan and Alternatives A and C would help to protect and recover populations of the federally listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, which would also help to protect and enhance wilderness values on 56,912 acres of public lands in the Santa Rosa Wilderness Additions.

No Action Alternative (D). Current management would help to protect and recover populations of the federally listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, thereby enhancing wilderness values in the Santa Rosa Wilderness Additions, though a less proactive approach could increase the time of recovery.

Hiking, Biking and Equestrian Trails. Proposed Plan (Alternatives A, B and C). Limiting non-motorized uses of the public lands in wilderness to protect sensitive resources could benefit resource values, as well as help maintain wilderness character on 166,860 acres of public lands where such character is based, wholly or in part, on those resources (applicable to the Santa Rosa and San Geronio Wilderness Additions, Mecca Hills Wilderness, and Orocopia Mountains Wilderness). The degree to which wilderness values would be better protected cannot be ascertained until resources to be protected and specific limitations on use are identified through an activity-level plan (e.g., Trails Management Plan element of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan which affects the Santa Rosa Wilderness Additions, and Meccacopia Recreation Area Management Plan which affects the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses).

No Action Alternative (D). Protection of resource values in wilderness from non-motorized activities would be afforded on a case-by-case basis upon identification of specific impacts and development of protective measures, including issuance of closure orders where necessary.

4.1.4 Farmlands

All Elements, All Alternatives. There are no BLM-managed lands under lease for agricultural production. Implementation of the air quality management strategy on the BLM-managed lands will help to share the responsibility for reducing air quality impacts throughout the Coachella Valley.

4.1.5 Livestock Grazing

Proposed Plan (Alternative A). If grazing is relinquished on 40,032 acres of public land, all of the Whitewater Canyon Allotment would be unavailable for livestock use. Cattle trespass onto intermingled private land would be eliminated or minimized without fencing. Allocation of the forage to wildlife, would support efforts to recover sensitive species and riparian proper functioning condition. If grazing is not relinquished, it could be re-established at some future date on 40,032 acres of public land once resource conditions have improved, based on a combined management strategy defined by the allotment management plan, grazing regulations, rangeland health standards, habitat conservation objectives, and biological opinions issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The permittee would be subject to physical access agreements with private landowners and whether or not allotment inholders will attempt to fence cattle off of their lands. Installation of a few minor range improvements, beyond the fences referenced above, would be necessary to maintain rangeland health and to meet resource objectives based on rangeland health assessments.

Alternative B. Deleting a portion of the Whitewater Canyon Allotment would eliminate a maximum of 248 annual unit months from the BLM-managed lands. Eliminating 18,956 public land acres of the Whitewater Canyon Allotment would make additional forage available for wildlife, minimize cattle trespass onto intermingled private land, and support efforts to recover riparian condition.

Alternative C. Deleting the Whitewater Canyon Allotment would make 40,032 acres unavailable for livestock grazing and eliminate a maximum of 990 annual unit months from the BLM-managed lands within the Coachella Valley. Otherwise, impacts would be similar to Alternative A (Proposed Plan).

No Acton Alternative (D). Cattle grazing use on 40,032 acres of public land could continue subject to physical access agreements with private landowners and whether or not allotment inholders will attempt to fence cattle off of their lands. However, grazing use of public lands would not be returned to the allotment until rangeland health standards are being met. When grazing is re-established, it would be based on a combined management strategy defined by the Allotment Management Plan, grazing regulations, rangeland health standards, and biological opinions issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Installation of a few minor range improvements, beyond the fences referenced above, would be necessary to maintain rangeland health and meet resource objectives based on rangeland health assessments.

The San Geronio Wilderness Additions (designated in the California Desert Protection Act), encompass nearly all of the Whitewater Canyon Allotment. Restrictions regarding the use of motorized vehicles, mechanized equipment, and development of new range improvements limit options for the permittee in managing grazing operations to resolve rangeland health problems.

To meet land health objectives, temporary reductions or shifts in grazing activities for

specific areas and periods would be employed to restore soil and vegetative conditions. These potential actions could require the lessee to regularly herd cattle, or construct range improvements to control livestock movement. No impacts to cattle grazing activities are expected when conducting prescribed treatment of tamarisk infestation in Whitewater Canyon in order to meet land health standards. Exclusion of livestock from treated areas are not expected to impact grazing activities due to the lack of suitable grazing land in the rocky bottom of Whitewater Canyon. Conversion to another class of livestock for better distribution is not an option in this area due to potential interactions with bighorn sheep. The lessee would be responsible for control and management of livestock while restoration continues.

During times when the allotment is not available for grazing use, the lessee would have to remove livestock until conditions are restored or range improvements are constructed. The improved vigor of perennial vegetation from maintenance of the standards would improve cattle forage over time and increase cattle weaning weights. Livestock in better body condition would reduce death loss through stress-related diseases.

4.1.6 Wild Horse and Burro Herd Management Areas

Proposed Plan (Alternative B) and Alternative C. Transferring public lands to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (Proposed Plan) and retiring the Palm Canyon and Morongo Herd Management Areas (Alternatives B and C) would eliminate all HMAs within the Coachella Valley. This impact is minimal due to the lack of wild horses and burros left in the Coachella Valley. Exchanging lands with the Tribe would help improve land management efficiency and minimize land use conflicts on the BLM-managed lands.

Alternatives A and No Action (D). Retaining the Palm Canyon and Morongo Herd Management Areas (Alternatives A and D), and establishing the Palm Canyon HMA as a grazing allotment for horses (Alternative A) would result in minimal impacts. However, land use conflicts within multi-species habitat conservation areas may arise (see discussion under “Biological Resources”). The Herd Management Areas would be assessed and additional mitigation measures may be required to assure conformance with land health standards.